استفسارات عامة يتسائل الناس فيها عن الإسلام

COMMON QUESTIONS People Ask About ISLAM?

Shabir Ally



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Al Attique Int'l Islamic Publications
Toronto, Ont. Canada



In the name of Allah,
Most Gracious,
Most Mercifu

About the Author:

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Question 1

What does *Jihad* mean?

Answer

This word represents a concept which is much misunderstood in the West. The term is explained nicely by the Christian scholar Ira G. Zepp, Jr. in his book entitled *A Muslim Primer* on pages 133-135. We adapt from his answer the following:

The essential meaning of Jihad is the spiritual, psychological, and physical effort we exert to be close to God and thus achieve a just and harmonious society. Jihad literally means "striving" or "struggle" and is shorthand for *Jihad fi Sabeel Allah* (struggle for God's cause). In a sense, every Muslim is a *Mujahid,* one who strives for God and justice.

Al-Ghazali captured the essence of Jihad when he said: "The real Jihad is the warfare against (one's own) passions." Dr. Ibrahim Abu-Rabi calls Jihad "the execution of effort against evil in the self and every manifestation of evil in society." In a way, Jihad is the Muslim's purest sacrifice: to struggle to live a perfect life and completely submit to God.

Another form of Jihad is the striving to translate the Word of God into action. If one has experienced God and received guidance from the Qur'an, one struggles to

apply that guidance in daily life. So the larger, more prevalent meaning of Jihad is the spiritual struggle of the soul. In this case, Jihad is always present for the believer whether there is an external enemy or not. We should never reduce Jihad to violence.

A third level of Jihad is popularly known as "holy war." The classic passage is found in the Qur'an:

وَقَاتِلُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ الَّذِينَ يُقَاتِلُونَكُمْ وَلَا تَعْتَدُوا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ الْمُعْتَدِينَ (البقرة 190)

"Fight in the way of Allah those who fight against you, but transgress not the limits. Truly Allah likes not the transgressors" (Qur'an 2:190).

It is crucial to note here that what is condoned is defensive warfare; Islam cannot justify aggressive war. Muhammad[1] and the Tradition are also against killing non-combatants, torturing of prisoners, the destruction of crops, animals and homes.
Adapted from Ira G. Zepp, Jr., A Muslim Primer (1992, Wakefield Editions, US) pp.133-135.

Robert Ellwood of the University of Southern California has the following to say about the Muslim concept of Jihad:
Out of the community ideaof Islam comes the concept of *jihad,* or holy war, which is designed to defend Islam and allow its social practice, though not to force

individual conversions, which is forbidden. Since Islam in principle is a community as well as a religion, presumably only an absolute pacifist would be able to reject the theory of jihad out of hand, since other communities also fight to defend or expand their ways of life.
(Many Peoples, Many Faiths by Robert S. Ellwood, 4th edition, Simon & Schuster, US, 1982, p. 346).

1 May Allah shower peace and blessings upon His noble messenger.

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Question 2

Why did Prophet Muhammad marry many wives?

Answer

When people hear that the prophet had many wives they conclude without much thought that the prophet was a sensuous man. However, a quick historical review of his marriages, proves otherwise.

When he was twenty-five years old he married for the first time. His wife, *Khadijah*, was fifteen years older than he. She remained the only wife of the prophet for the next twenty-five years, until she died (may Allah be pleased with her).

Only after her death, did the prophet marry other

women. Now, it is obvious that if the prophet was after physical pleasure he did not have to wait until he was more than fifty years old to start marrying more wives. He lived in a society in which it was quite acceptable to have many wives. But the prophet remained devoted to his only wife for twenty-five years. When she died she was sixty-five years old.

His later marriages were for various reasons. Some marriages were with the view to help the women whose husbands had been killed while they were defending their faith. Others were with a view to cement relationships with devoted followers like Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him. Yet others were to build bridges with various tribes who were otherwise at war with the Muslims. When the prophet became their relative through marriage, their hostilities calmed down, and much blood shed was averted.

Recent non-Muslim writers who had the opportunity to study the life of the prophet first-hand reach a similar conclusion about his plural marriages.

John L. Esposito, Professor of Religion and Director of the Centre for International Studies at the College of the Holy Cross, says that most of these marriages had "political and social motives" (Islam: The Straight Path, Oxford University Press, 1988, p. 19). This he explained as follows:

"As was customary for Arab chiefs, many were political marriages to cement alliances. Others were marriages to the widows of his companions who had fallen in combat and were in need of protection" (John L. Esposito, Islam: The Straight Path, pp. 19-20).

Esposito reminds us of the following historical fact: "Though less common, polygyny was also permitted in biblical and even in postbiblical Judaism. From Abraham, David, and Solomon down to the reformation period, polygyny was practiced (p. 19).

Another non-Muslim Caesar E. Farah writes as follows:

"In the prime of his youth and adult years Muhammad remained thoroughly devoted to Khadijah and would have none other for consort. This was an age that looked upon plural marriages with favor and in a society that in pre-Biblical and post-Biblical days considered polygamy an essential feature of social existence. David had six wives and numerous concubines (2 Samuel 5:13; 1 Chronicles 3:1-9, 14:3) and Solomon was said to have had as many as 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3). Solomon's son Rehoboam had 18 wives and 60 concubines (2 Chronicles 11:21). The New Testament contains no specific injunction against plural marriages. It was commonplace for the nobility among the Christians and Jews to contract plural marriages. Luther spoke of it with toleration" (Caesar E. Farah, Islam: Beliefs and Observances, 4th edition, Barron's, U.S. 1987, p. 69).

Caesar Farah then concluded that Muhammad's plural marriages were due "partly to political reasons and partly to his concern for the wives of his companions who had fallen in battle defending the nascent Islamic community" (p. 69).

[1] May Allah shower peace and blessings upon His noble

messenger.

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Question 3

Isn't it true that Islam was spread by the sword?

Answer

No. This is not true. However, this is a common misconception in the minds of many people.

The Qur'an declares:

لَا إِكْرَاهَ فِي الدِّينِ قَدْ تَبَيَّنَ الرُّشْدُ مِنَ الغَيِّ فَمَنْ يَكْفُرْ بِالطَّاغُوتِ وَيُؤْمِنْ بِاللَّهِ فَقَدْ اسْتَمْسَكَ بِالْعُرْوَةِ الْوُثْقَى لَا انفِصَامَ لَهَا وَاللَّهُ سَمِيعٌ عَلِيمٌ

(البقرة256)

"There is no compulsion in religion. The right direction is henceforth distinct from error" (Qur'an 2:256).

This Qur'anic verse shows that God has made truth and falsehood distinct from each other and people are therefore free to choose one or the other. No one can be forced to believe in a religion since belief is something very personal. One who follows the Qur'an will not try to force another person to believe.

Even the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, could not force another person to become a Muslim. God revealed to him the following words:

وَلَوْ شَاءَ رَبُّكَ لَآمَنَ مَنْ فِي الْأَرْضِ كُلُّهُمْ جَمِيعًا أَفَأَنْتَ تُكْرِهُ النَّاسَ حَتَّى يَكُونُوا
مُؤْمِنِينَ(99)وَمَا كَانَ لِنَفْسٍ أَنْ تُؤْمِنَ إِلَّا بِإِذْنِ اللَّهِ وَيَجْعَلُ الرِّجْسَ عَلَى الَّذِينَ لَا
يَعْقِلُونَ (يونس 99 - 100)

"And if your Lord willed, all who are in the earth would have believed together. Would you then compel people until they become believers? It is not for any soul to believe except by the permission of Allah (Qur'an 10:99-100).

This instruction from God makes it clear that anyone is mistaken who thinks that he or she can compel others to believe. If God wanted He could make everyone believers, but rather has given them free choice. Even so, no one can believe upon being forced. It is the grace of God on a person that will result in belief. Is there a teaching more beautiful than this? How could any true follower of the Qur'an turn around and force his faith on others?

On the contrary, the Qur'an instructs its followers on how to call people to true faith as follows:

ادْعُ إِلَى سَبِيلِ رَبِّكَ بِالْحِكْمَةِ وَالْمَوْعِظَةِ الْحَسَنَةِ وَجَادِلْهُمْ بِالَّتِي هِيَ أَحْسَنُ
إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِالْمُهْتَدِينَ (النحل125)

"Call unto the way of your Lord with wisdom and fair exhortation, and reason with them in the better way" (Qur'an 16:125).

Where does the Qur'an say call people at the point of a sword? It does not. God instructed his messenger, on whom be peace, as follows:

قُلْ هَذِهِ سَبِيلِي أَدْعُو إِلَى اللَّهِ عَلَى بَصِيرَةٍ أَنَا وَمَنْ اتَّبَعَنِي وَسُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ وَمَا أَنَامِنْ الْمُشْرِكِينَ (يوسف 108)

"Say: This is my Way: I invite unto Allah with sure knowledge, I and whosoever follows me" (Qur'an 12:108).

Here again, the call is to be made with sure knowledge, with clear evidence. Putting these instructions together, a Muslim understands that he or she must present Islam with clear evidence (i.e. sure knowledge) and use wisdom and fair exhortation to reason with people to accept the evidence for faith. Where is there any mention of sword in all of this? The Junior Encyclopedia of Canada says: "Islam is the fastest-growing religion worldwide" (*The Junior Encyclopedia of Canada,* Hurtig Publishers, Canada, 1990, Vol. 2, p. 396).

What explains this phenomenon? Who is forcing anyone today to become Muslims? Muslims are not even engaged in active preaching in any noticeable degree.

People are voluntarily coming into Islam because they find that Islam makes sense.

Huston Smith discusses in his book entitled *The World's Religions,* on page 256, how the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, granted freedom of religion to the Jews and Christians under Muslim rule. The prophet had a document drawn up in which he stipulated that Jews and Christians shall be "protected from all insults and vexations; they shall have an equal right with our own people to our assistance and good offices," and furthermore, that they shall "practice their religion as freely as the Muslims" (Quoted in *The World's Religions* by Huston Smith, Harper Collins, 1991, p. 256). Smith points out that Muslims regard that document as "the first charter of freedom of conscience in human history and the authoritative model for those of every subsequent Muslim state" (p. 256).

So, was Islam spread by the sword? The following short answer comes from Ira Zepp Jr., a non-Muslim, in his book entitled *A Muslim Primer:*

"It is unfortunate that Islam has been stereotyped as the 'religion of the sword' or that Islam was 'spread by the sword.' The historical reality is that the expansion of Islam was usually by persuasion anot by military power. In any case, Islam cannot be forced on anyone; if profession of the *shahadah* [i.e. the declaration of Islam] is forced on someone, it is not true Islam" (*A Muslim Primer* by Ira Zepp, Jr., 1992, Wakefield Editions, US, p. 134).

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Question 4

Muslims believe that Jesus did not die on the cross. Does that mean he died of natural causes? Will he come again? How come he is the only prophet to return?

Answer

Muslims believe that God's messenger Jesus, son of Mary, on whom be peace, did not die yet. God tells us in His own words that Jesus was raised up by God and that he was neither killed nor crucified (see Qur'an 4:157-158).

Furthermore, God tells us that in order to foil the plans of the unbelievers, God recalled Jesus and raised him up (see Qur'an 3:55):

Muslims understand from these Quranic passages that Jesus did not die.

Muslims believe that Jesus will be coming again. A common explanation of verse 159 of Surah 4 in the Qur'an is that when Jesus returns, the people of the book will each believe in Jesus as he really is. Another verse in the Qur'an calls Jesus, on whom be peace, a sign of the day of Judgement (see Qur'an 43:61).

This was further explained by the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, when he said that Jesus's return will

be a sign that the day of Judgement is near.

God alone knows the full wisdom behind what He does. We can only try to understand some of the reasons. With God's help we can point to several reasons why Jesus will be coming again.

One reason is that when the angel Gabriel announced to Mary about the birth of Jesus, he prophesied that Jesus will speak to mankind while he is a baby and again when he is mature (see Qur'an 3:46).

But the Arabic word *kahlan* here translated 'maturity' actually refers to a maturity at 40 years old. When Jesus comes back he will live to this age and the prophecy will be fulfilled. Jesus also foretold his death (see Qur'an 19:33).

This too will be fulfilled when he returns, and Jesus will be buried in Medina near his brother in faith, the last prophet, on whom be peace.

Another reason for Jesus's second coming is that he will be honoured with the opportunity to personally correct the belief of his people. Too many have disbelieved and rejected him. Many others have believed incorrectly about him. When he returns, everyone will believe in him correctly.

Another reason for his coming is that some of his teachings have been forgotten (see Qur'an 5:14) and replaced by misguided teachings (see Qur'an 5:77, 9:30). Jesus will have the honour to break the symbols of such false teachings and to dramatically confirm his true teachings which were also taught by his brother in faith, the last prophet, on whom be peace.

Another reason is that in the last days an evil man called the Antichrist will arise. He will spread much corruption on the earth. Jesus will return to slay this man and restore peace on earth.

As to why Jesus alone and no other prophet will come back is for God alone to say. The above are only a few indications.

Finally, we must admit that Jesus, on whom be peace, was very unique. His entry into the world was unique, his departure was unique, and his return will be spectacular. The Qur'an rightly calls him

إِذْ قَالَتِ الْمَلَائِكَةُ يَا مَرْيَمُ إِنَّ اللَّهَ يُبَشِّرُكِ بِكَلِمَةٍ مِنْهُ اسْمُهُ الْمَسِيحُ عِيسَى ابْنُ مَرْيَمَ وَجِيهًا فِي الدُّنْيَا وَالْآخِرَةِ وَمِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ (ال عمران 45)

"illustrious in the world and the Hereafter, and one of those brought near (unto Allah)" (Qur'an 3:45).

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Question 5

Why does the Qur'an allow Muslim men to have four wives?

Answer

There are some situations in which it is advantageous to

society to have men marry multiple wives, and for this reason polygyny is practiced by many religions and cultures. As we have already seen in answer to question 2, polygyny is permitted in the Bible too. Here we will see that the Qur'an permits only a restricted and limited form of that practice. Only 2% of Muslim marriages are of this nature.

Notice that the Qur'an permits but does not command a man to have four wives. Furthermore, the Qur'an stipulates that a man is responsible for the maintenance of his wife or wives. If a man has more than one wife, he has to provide separate living accommodation for each of his wives.

Multiple marriages are a heavy responsibility on the male. It is not a pleasure trip as some people may assume. Some even imagine all kinds of sexual exploits involving a man and his wives altogether. However, such activity is not permissible in Islam. A man must divide his time equally among his wives. He may, for example, spend one night with each wife on a rotating schedule.

If a man cannot maintain justice in the treatment of his wives, the Qur'an stipulates that he is to have no more than one wife.

Polygyny provides a solution to some of life's problems. When there is a shortage of men, for example after a devastating war, many women will be unable to find husbands. Most women in that situation, given the option, would rather be a co-wife than no wife. If one maintains a strict monogamy in such a situation, moral depravity is bound to result.

It may be useful at this point to see what some non-Muslim writers are now saying on this much misunderstood subject.

John Esposito says:

"Although it is found in many religious and cultural traditions, polygamy (or more precisely, polygyny) is most often identified with Islam in the minds of Westerners. In fact, the Qur'an and Islamic Law sought to control and regulate the number of spouses rather than give free license. (John Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path,* Oxford University, 1988, p. 97).

Esposito then goes on to explain that in a society which allowed men an unlimited number of wives, Islam limited the number of wives to four. Then he continued to say: "The Qur'an permits a man to marry up to four wives, provided he can support and treat them all equally. Muslims regard this Quranic command as strengthening the status of women and the family for it sought to ensure the welfare of single women and widows in a society whose male population was diminished by warfare, and to curb unrestricted polygamy" (John Esposito: *Islam the Straight Path,* p. 97).

Karen Armstrong explains much the same in her book entitled *Muhammad: A Western Attempt to Understand Islam.* She says:

"We have to see the ruling about polygamy in context. In seventh-century Arabia, when a man could have as many wives as he chose, to prescribe only four was a limitation, not a license to new oppression" (Karen Armstrong, Muhammad: A Western Attempt to

Understand Islam, Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1991, p. 191).

It is unfortunate that the Western media often gives the wrong impression of what Islam is all about. Karen Armstrong writes:

"Popular films like *Harem* give an absurd and inflated picture of the sexual life of the Muslim sheikh which reveals more about Western fantasy than it does about the reality" (p. 190).

Some people incorrectly assume that because of this ruling most Muslim men would have four wives. However, as Huston Smith points out, "multiple wives are seldom found in Islam today" (*The World's Religions,* p. 252). Ira Zepp, Jr. says that "less than 2% of Muslim marriages are polygamous" (*A Muslim Primer,* p. 180).

About this being a solution for the problem of surplus women, Ira Zepp, Jr. comments on page 181 of his book: "The Roman Catholic Church is facing the same problem today in parts of Africa. Social and economic reasons are forcing the Church to reconsider polygamy as a Christian option. See *Polygamy Reconsidered* by Eugene Hillman, New York: Orbis Press, 1973."

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Question 6

Isn't it true that the Qur'an is copied from the Bible?

Answer

No. This is not true. All evidence show that the Qur'an could not have been copied from the Bible.

Take for example the story of the flood that occurred in the days of the prophet Noah, on be peace. This event is narrated in both the Bible and the Qur'an. A careful examination of the two versions will show that the Qur'anic version could have come from no other source but God alone.

One important difference between the two accounts is that whereas the Bible describes the flood as a worldwide flood (see Genesis ch. 7), the Qur'an mentions it as a local flood affecting the people of Noah (see Qur'an 7:59-64). Today it is acknowledged that no record exists of a worldwide flood occurring at the time specified in the Bible. How did the author of the Qur'an avoid this mistake unless the author was God Himself?

The closest thing in history to a flood like the one described in the Bible and the Qur'an, is a discovery made by Archaeologist Sir Charles Leonard Wooley. In 1929 he discovered remains from a flood which occurred around 4000 B.C. His findings are described in the book entitled *The Bible as History* by Werner Keller. Keller tells us:

"The incredible discovery at Ur made headline news in the United States and in Britain" (*The Bible as History,* 2nd Revised Edition, Bantam Books, 1980, p. 27).

But was this a worldwide flood? After describing the extent of the flood, Keller explains:

"Looking at the map we should call it today 'a local occurrence'" (p. 28).

"In other words," writes Keller, that flood was "obviously not of sufficient magnitude for the Biblical Flood" (p. 29). Furthermore, he says: "A flood of the unimaginable extent described in the Bible still remains 'archaeologically not demonstrated'" (pp. 29-30).

Another comparison will again demonstrate that the Qur'an was not copied from the Bible. In the Bible we are told that God drowned the Pharaoh and his army when they pursued Moses, on whom be peace, and his people (see Exodus 14:28). The clear indication in that description is that the body of the Pharaoh perished in the sea. However, the Qur'an dared to differ and prove true. In the Qur'an we find that God promised to preserve the body of the Pharaoh as a sign for later generations (see Qur'an 10:90-92).

True to the Qur'anic promise, the mummified body of the Pharaoh was discovered by Loret in 1898 at Thebes in the Kings' Valley (see *The Bible, the Qur'an and Science* by Dr. Maurice Bucaille, p. 238). From there it was transported to Cairo. Elliot Smith removed its wrappings on July 8, 1907 and gave a detailed description in his book entitled the Royal Mummies (1912).

From which source did the author of the Qur'an derive this information? How did the author of the Qur'an know that the Pharaoh's body was preserved whereas the knowledge that the ancient Egyptians mummified their dead was not discovered until recently? And how could

the author of the Qur'an predict that the body of the Pharaoh will be discovered later, unless the author was God Himself?

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Question 7

Dr. Robert Morey claims in his book that Allah is the name of the moon god worshipped in Arabia before Islam. Is he right?

Answer

The book you refer to is entitled *The Islamic Invasion: Confronting the World's Fastest Growing Religion,* published by Harvest House Publishers, Oregon, US, 1992. The author, Dr. Robert Morey, sees Islam as an invasion into North America and a threat to his religious heritage. Unfortunately, Dr. Morey has resorted to dishonest tactics is combating Islam. To prove his contention that Allah is not the God of Christians and Jews, he quoted from several books in such a dishonest fashion that the quotations say the opposite of what we find in those books (see quotations on pages 47-53 of Dr. Morey's book).

Dr. Morey quoted from the Encyclopedia Britannica to support his case. But in fact the Encyclopedia says: "Allah is the standard Arabic word for "God" and is used by Arab Christians as well as by Muslims"

(Britannica, 1990 Edition, vol. 1, p. 276).

Dr. Morey also quoted from H.A.R Gibb to support his case. But Gibb actually says the opposite. In his book *Mohammedanism*, Gibb says on page 26 that both Muhammad and his opponents believed in "the existence of a supreme God Allah." Gibb further explained this on pages 37-38 (see *Mohammedanism* by H.A.R. Gibb, Oxford University Press, 1969). Dr. Morey should have checked his references more carefully before his book went into print.

Dr. Morey said that Alfred Guillaume agrees with him, and he refers to page 7 of Alfred Guillaume's book entitled *Islam*. But here is what Alfred Guillaume actually says on page 7 of his book:

"In Arabia Allah was known from Christian and Jewish sources as the one God, and there can be no doubt whatever that he was known to the pagan Arabs of Mecca as the supreme being" (Islam by Alfred Guillaume, Penguin, 1956, p. 7). How could Dr. Morey misquote like this?

Dr. Morey quoted from page 28 of a book by another non-Muslim writer Caesar Farah. But when we refer to that book we find that Dr. Morey gave only a partial quotation which leaves out the main discussion. The book actually says that the God who was called Il by the Babylonians and El by the Israelites was called ilah, al-ilah, and eventually Allah in Arabia (see *Islam: Beliefs and Observances*, by Caesar Farah, Barron's Educational Series, 4th Edition, p. 28). Farah says further on page 31 that before Islam the pagans had already believed that

Allah is the supreme deity. Of course they had 360 idols, but, contrary to Dr. Morey's assertion, Allah was never one of the 360 idols. As Caesar Farah points out on page 56, the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, personally destroyed those idols.

Dr. Morey also quoted from William Montgomery Watt. But Watt says on page 26 of his book that the Arabic word Allah is similar to the Greek term *ho theos* which we know is the way God is referred to in the New Testament (*see Muhammad; Prophet and Statesman* by William Montgomery Watt, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 26).

Dr. Morey also quoted from Kenneth Cragg's book entitled *The Call of the Minaret*. However, on page 36 of Kenneth Cragg's book we find the following:
"Since both Christian and Muslim faiths believe in One supreme sovereign Creator-God, they are obviously referring when they speak of Him, under whatever terms, to the same Being." (*The Call of the Minaret* by Kenneth Cragg, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 36).

Further on the same page, Cragg explains that the One whom the Muslims call Allah is the same One whom the Christians call 'the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ', although the two faiths understand Him differently.

Dr. Morey should know that as a scholar he has the academic obligation to quote honestly. He should also know that as a follower of Jesus, on whom be peace, he has an obligation to speak the truth.

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Question 8

What are some of the rights given to women in Islam?

Answer

The Qur'an places men and women on a similar relationship before God, and promises both the final goal of paradise for those who believe and do right (see Qur'an 3:195; 4:124; 16:19; 40:40).

The Qur'an also speaks of similarity in terms of creation. God tells us that He created a single soul and from it its mate, then He made countless men and women from those two (see Qur'an 4:1). The Qur'an does not contain the belief that the man alone is created in the image of God.

Because of this fundamental similarity between men and women, the Qur'an declares that women have rights similar to the rights against them according to what is equitable (see Qur'an 2:228).

In a time when women were devalued and female infants were buried alive, the Qur'an raised the value of women and prohibited female infanticide. Due to the Qur'an, this practice was abolished, but in recent times advances in the science of genetic selection has encouraged some unbelievers to practice a modern form of female infanticide.

The Qur'an also abolished the practice whereby

inheritance went to only the oldest male heir. Instead, a woman can inherit from hfather, her husband, and her childless brother (see Qur'an 4:7, 32, 176).

In Islam when a woman gets married she does not surrender her maiden name, but maintains her distinct identity. Some Muslim women have adopted the surnames of their husbands, but this is due to cultural influence, not Islam.

In a Muslim marriage the groom gives a dowry to the bride, not to her father. This becomes her private property to keep or spend, and is not subject to the dictates of her male relatives. Any money she earns or receives is similarly her very own.

Under Islamic Law a woman cannot be married without her consent. She has final approval on a marriage partner and she can repudiate a marriage arranged without her consent. She also has the right to initiate a separation from marriage if her rights under marriage are not being granted.

Widows have the right to remarry, and they are in fact encouraged to do so.

The Qur'an places on men the responsibility of protecting and maintaining their female relatives. This relieves women of the need to earn their own living. It also means that a man must provide for his wife even if she has money of her own. She is not obligated to spend her money in the maintenance of her family. Incidentally, a woman is also not required to cook for her family, although she may do so out of love and compassion. The example of our noble prophet, on

whom be peace, is that although he was such a great leader, he assisted in the housecleaning and mended his own clothes.

In return for the added responsibility, the Qur'an gives men the degree of leadership (see Qur'an 2:228; 4:34). This does not mean that men should dominate women, but rather that they should deal with them in kindness, mercy, and love (see Qur'an 4:19; 30:21).

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Question 9

Muslims say they do not worship idols. How come when they go to Mecca they kiss a black stone? Isn't that like worshipping an idol?

Answer

Muslims do not worship the black stone. They regard the stone as a created thing. The most fundamental principle of Islam is that nothing or no one is to be worshipped except Allah, the one true God.

Muslims who can afford the journey are required once in their lifetime to visit the House of Worship in Makkah. This was the first house built for the worship of the One true God. Abraham and his son Ishmael, peace be upon them, constructed it. The black stone was brought to them from heaven by the angel Gabriel to function as a corner stone. It was thus affixed in one

corner.

Because Muslims kiss that stone, some observers hastily conclude that Muslims worship it. A kiss, however, is not an act of worship unless it is accompanied by an intention to worship. If you kiss your child, for instance, that does not mean you worship your child.

Some may find it strange that Muslims should treat a stone with respect. But this is not just any old stone. It is an item out of paradise.

The act of fixing a stone to mark a place of worship is as old as history. In the Bible we are told that Jacob, on whom be peace, had fixed a stone at a place where he saw a vision. He poured oil on it and called it *Bethel* meaning 'house of God' (see Genesis 28:18). He did this again upon God's instruction (see Genesis 35:1, 14, 15). No one should understand from this that God instructed Jacob to worship the stone.

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Question 10

Muhammad is dead. But Jesus is alive. Doesn't that mean that Jesus is superior to Muhammad?

Answer

Muslims believe that Jesus and Muhammad were both prophets and messengers of Allah. Peace be upon both

of them.

Muslims will not belittle any of God's prophets or reject their message. The Qur'an tells us to declare our faith in all of the prophets including Abraham, Moses, and Jesus, and that we should make no distinction among them (see Qur'an 2:136; 3:84; 2:285). This means that since each of them preached the true message of God, it would be wrong to say we believe in some but not in others.

The prophets themselves were humble servants of God. They did not try to prove themselves superior to others. It would be wrong for their followers to argue over who is superior.

Once a Muslim and a Jew were arguing. The Muslim said that Muhammad is superior over all the people. The Jew said that Moses is superior over all the people. When this was related to the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, he said,

"Do not give me superiority over Moses" (This is recorded in Sahih al-Bukhari, vol. 4, p. 410, Arabic-English edition).

He also said "None should say that I am better than Jonah, son of Matta" (ibid, p. 413). He also instructed, "Do not give superiority to any prophet among Allah's prophets" (ibid, p. 414).

Once the Prophet was asked, "Who is the most honorable among the people?" He replied, "The most God-fearing". When he was asked to name a specific individual, he replied,

"The most honorable person is Joseph (i.e. the son of

Jacob)" (ibid, p. 390).

Other prophets too shared this humility. The prophet Jesus, on whom be peace, is reported to have said,
"I tell you the truth: Among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist" (Matthew 11:11).

But John the Baptist was also humble. He did not claim that greatness for himself. He spoke of a greater one who was to come after him. He is quoted as saying,
"After me will come one more powerful than I, the thongs of whose sandals I am not worthy to stoop down and untie" (Mark 1:7).

When God sent the angel Gabriel to take the prophet Muhammad to the Aqsa Mosque one night, the prophet, on whom be peace, led the prayers there, and the other prophets followed his lead. He also related the truth that on the Day of Judgment he will lead the banner of Praise under which will be all the other prophets. But the prophet Muhammad did not boast about this.

He instructed Muslims that they should not praise him as the people praised Jesus, son of Mary. He said,
"Call me a slave of Allah and His Messenger" (Bukhari, vol. 4, p. 435).

What is important is not to try and prove one prophet superior over another, but to believe in both of them. The prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, said:
"If a man believes in Jesus and then believes in me, he will get a double reward" (ibid. p. 435).

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Question 11

What does Islam say about domestic violence?

Answer

Islam condemns domestic violence. Once a number of women came to the prophet, on whom be peace, to complain that their husbands had beaten them. The prophet announced that men who beat their wives are not good men. The prophet also said,
"Do not beat the female servants of Allah."

Allah knows that life is not always a bowl of cherries. And so He stipulates that a man must be kind to his wife even if he happens to dislike her (Qur'an 4:19). Allah offers a good reason as to why men should not dislike their wives. Allah says that He has placed much good in women (Qur'an 4:19).

In this regard the prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, said that no believing man should hold a grudge against a believing woman. So what is a husband to do if he dislikes some things about his wife? This is bound to occur, since no human being is perfect. The prophet instructed that men should look for the agreeable traits in their wives rather than focus on their faults. (See *Saheeh Muslim*, chapter on advice relating to women).

The prophet also advised men that if they wish to benefit from marriage they should accept their wives as they are rather than try to straighten them out and thus

end up in divorce.

In the following verse of the Qur'an, Allah warns men that if they retain their wives in marriage it should not be to take advantage of them. The verse reads:

وَإِذَا طَلَّقْتُمْ النِّسَاءَ فَبَلَغْنَ أَجَلَهُنَّ فَأَمْسِكُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ أَوْ سَرِّحُوهُنَّ بِمَعْرُوفٍ وَلَا تُمْسِكُوهُنَّ ضِرَارًا لِتَعْتَدُوا وَمَنْ يَفْعَلْ ذَلِكَ فَقَدْ ظَلَمَ نَفْسَهُ وَلَا تَتَّخِذُوا آيَاتِ اللَّهِ هُزُوًا (البقرة 231)

"Retain them in kindness or release them in kindness. But do not retthem to their hurt so that you transgress (the limits). If anyone does that he wrongs his own soul. Do not take God's instructions as a jest" (Qur'an 2:231).

Once the prophet, on whom be peace, was asked what are the obligations of husbands toward their wives. He replied:

"Feed her when you eat, and provide her clothing when you provide yourself. Neither hit her on the face nor use impolite language when addressing her" (See *Mishkat*, chapter on the maintenance of women).

The prophet equated perfect belief with good treatment to one's wife when he said:

"The most perfect believer is one who is the best in courtesy and amiable manners, and the best among you people is one who is most kind and courteous to his wives" (see *Tirmidhi*, chapter on the obligations of a man to his wife).

Finally, the prophet, the best example of conduct said: "The best among you is the one who treats his family best."

Some of the last words of the prophet delivered during the farewell pilgrimage enjoins that men should hold themselves accountable before Allah concerning the question of how they treat their wives. Therefore his advice to all men, is as follows:
"You must treat them with all kindness."

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Question 12

Muslims say they do not believe in the Bible. Yet, when it is convenient for them, they quote verses out of context to prove their claims. Isn't this a dishonest way of going about it?

Answer

It is wrong and dishonest to quote anything or any book out of context, whether it be the Bible or the Qur'an. No Muslim should resort to such an approach. God wants us to spread the truth by honest means only.

Having said that, it should also be said that belief in God's revealed books is an essential part of Muslims' fatih. Muslims believe that the original Bible that was a collection of God's revelations, does not exist any more. They (like Christians and Jews) do not believe that every

single word of the present Bible is God's revelation. No reasonable person can do that.
I Samuel chapter 17, verses 23 & 50 says that David killed Goliath. II Samuel 21:19 says that Elhanan killed Goliath. I Chronicles 20:5 says that Elhanan killed not Goliath but the brother of Goliath whose name is given as Lahmi. Obviously, no reasonable person should believe all three reports.

Knowing this, the editors of the King James Bible decided to fix this problem by making a slight correction to the Bible. They inserted three words in II Samuel 21:19 to make it say there also that Elhanan killed the brother of Goliath. You will notice that the three words *the brother of* appear there in italics to distinguish them from the rest of the Bible.

The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible calls this a "conflict of tradition about Goliath" (p. 179; see also p. 212). It says further that the author of Chronicles changed the story where it said that Elhanan killed Goliath to make it say that Elhanan killed Lahmi the brother of Goliath. The same commentary says further that the statement in I Chronicles is "incorrect" (p. 180). So here we have a Bible commentary written by Christians, published by Christians, and sold in Christian bookstores — yet it openly disagrees with a statement in the Bible. This was done not because Christians wanted to disbelieve in the Bible, but because they had to choose, among different statements in the Bible, which statement is more believable.

Now, this approach to the Bible does not mean that

Christians cannot refer to the Bible or quote from it or write commentaries on it. Likewise for Muslims.

Although Muslims, like their Christian and Jewish neighbours, do not believe in every single thing the Bible says, students of comparative religion should be allowed to study both the Qur'an and the Bible. Every honest student, however, will pay close attention to the context of what he or she reads, and apply scrupulous exactitude when quoting from either book.

May God help us and guide us all to understand His true message regardless in which book that truth is contained.

***

Question 13

What does Islam say about abortion? Are there any circumstances when abortion is allowed in Islam? What if pregnancy results from rape or incest?

Answer

Islam values human life. This is clearly expressed in the Qur'an where we are told that in the sight of God killing a human is a very serious matter (see Qur'an 5:32).

The Qur'an teaches that on the Day of Judgement parents who killed their children will be under trial for that crime, and their children will be witnesses against them (see Qur'an 81:8-9).

People often fear that having more children will make

them poor. In reply to that, the Qur'an says:

وَلَا تَقْتُلُوا أَوْلَادَكُمْ خَشْيَةَ إِمْلَاقٍ نَحْنُ نَرْزُقُهُمْ وَإِيَّاكُمْ إِنَّ قَتْلَهُمْ كَانَ خِطْئًا كَبِيرًا (الاسرا 31)

"Do not slay your children for fear of poverty. We shall provide for them and for you" (Qur'an 17:31).

Even in a case where one is already poor, the Qur'an insists that Allah will provide sustenance for us and for our children, and furthermore that Allah has made human life sacred (see Qur'an 6:151).

The right to life is God-given. No human should take away that right. The general rule, therefore, is that abortion is not permitted in Islam.

However, Islam is a very practical religion. It includes principles to deal with exceptional cases. One such principle is that when a pregnancy threatens the life of the mother, an abortion may be performed. Although the lives of both mother and child are sacred, in this case it is better to save the principal life, the life of the mother. Even in this case, it would be better if the abortion is done before the fetus is 120 days old, for that is when the soul is breathed into the fetus.

Islam does not permit abortion in other cases.

Women who have been victims of rape or incest naturally deserve sympathy and help. But a child conceived in this unfortunate manner still has a right to live. Of course this places an unwanted burden on the

mother, but killing the child is not the right solution.

To understand this point better, suppose someone sees the poorer sections of society as an unwanted burden on the rich. Would it be right then to kill off all the poor? Of course not. Why then should anyone decide that a child should be killed just because of being an unwanted burden?

Society as a whole should help such a mother and relieve her as far as possible. But the child should not be killed.

Furthermore, the fact that such cases occur is an indication that people desperately need spiritual food. They need the pure teachings that will help people turn their minds away from adultery, rape, and incest. People need God. Can you help someone to turn to God?

***

Question 14

Jesus said that he is the way and that no one can come to God except through him. What do Muslims say about that?

Answer

Muslims believe that Jesus, on whom be peace, was indeed the way. This means that he showed the way by which people should approach God. He expected that people should follow him and imitate him. His early

followers were called followers of the way because, obviously, they followed Jesus, and Jesus was the way (see Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9; 19:23; 22:4; 24:14; 24:22). They were also called Christians, which means 'imitators of Christ' (see Acts 11:26). This shows that the early followers of Jesus copied and imitated him.

Jesus had said that his true followers will hold on to his teachings, then they will know the truth, and the truth will set them free (see John 8:31-32). God did reveal His truth in these last times. And true followers of Jesus will readily accept that truth, for they will find it in agreement with thunadulterated teachings of Jesus. In these last times God has sent a messenger and declared that anyone who claims to love Him must follow His messenger, on whom be peace. God directs His messenger as follows:

قُلْ إِنْ كُنتُمْ تُحِبُّونَ اللَّهَ فَاتَّبِعُونِي يُحْبِبْكُمُ اللَّهُ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ذُنُوبَكُمْ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ (ال عمران 31)

"Say! If you love Allah then follow me. Allah will love you and forgive your sins. Surely Allah is Forgiving, Merciful" (Qur'an 3:31).

Now this messenger, Muhammad, on whom be peace, has brought God's final message for all of humankind. If we love God we must follow him. He brought the truth which Jesus said his true followers will recognise. The truth sets people free from unreasonable doctrines and

dogmas.

Confusion arises in the minds of some who imagine that Jesus is the only way for peoples of all times and all places. Clearly, the Old Testament prophets directed people to Yahweh the only God. They showed therefore the way to Yahweh. In fact, people were calling on the name of Yahweh since the time of Adam (see Genesis 4:1).

Jesus was the way for his time; now Muhammad is the way. We believe in both of them, and we worship the one God whom they both worshipped. These men showed us the way to worship God. Jesus, for example, fell on his knees and worshipped God (see Luke 22:41). He also fell on his face and worshipped God (see Matthew 26:39). Muhammad too adopted similar postures of humility in worshipping God. Likewise is the practice of the true imitators of Jesus and Muhammad, peace be upon both of them.

Finally, we should recall that Jesus is the way, not the destination. He spoke of one who is greater than himself (see John 14:28). And he said that that one alone is the only true God (see John 17:3).

God has sent numerous prophets and messengers. Each in his time was the way to God. No one can approach God in a way contrary to the way of God's messenger. This is why God said that He will call to account anyone who does not listen to His prophet who will speak in His name (see Deuteronomy 18:19).

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Question 15

Muslims say that the Qur'an is a Miracle. What is so miraculous about a book?

Answer

Previous prophets performed miracles to prove that their message was not their own but God's message. In the case of the Qur'an, the message itself is the miracle.

The prophet Muhammad, on whom be peace, did not know how to read or write. Yet the Qur'an which was being revealed to him was (and still is) the highest pinnacle of literary beauty and excellence in the Arabic Language. It was beyond the ability of the prophet to produce this book. And God declares that it is beyond the ability of all of humankind and spirit-kind to produce a book like the Qur'an.

The Qur'an was revealed piece by piece over a period of twenty-three years. During this time, God challenged humankind four times to produce a book like the Qur'an, and they couldn't do it. When the prophet and his followers were being persecuted in Mecca, God showed the persecutors a simple way in which they can wipe out the message of the Qur'an. God stated that this book cannot be produced by men or spirit creatures. Obviously, if they pooled together their abilities and composed a book like the Qur'an they would have proved

the Qur'an to be false in its claim. But they couldn't. And here is what the Qur'an claims:

قُلْ لَئِنْ اجْتَمَعَتْ الْإِنسُ وَالْجِنُّ عَلَى أَنْ يَأْتُوا بِمِثْلِ هَذَا الْقُرْآنِ لَا يَأْتُونَ بِمِثْلِهِ وَلَوْ كَانَ بَعْضُهُمْ لِبَعْضٍ ظَهِيراً (الاسرا 88)

"Say: If the whole of mankind and Jinns were to gather together to produce the like of this Qur'an they could not produce the like thereof, even if they backed up each other with help and support" (Qur'an 17:88).

Although people ardently wished to block the message of the Qur'an and they tried every thing they could to stifle it, yet they did not try this obvious strategy. Why? Because it cannot be done.

So God reduced the challenge for them: never mind the whole book; produce just ten chapters if you can. This challenge is mentioned in Surah 11:13 in the Qur'an. Again they couldn't do it. And they were the literary giants of their day. They held fairs to promote their own literary masterpieces. They hung their prized compositions on the door of the house of pilgrimage for all to see. But they could not match the stunning verses of the Qur'an.

God reduced the challenge further still (see Qur'an 10:38). If they cannot produce ten chapters then how about one chapter? Just one! And they couldn't do it, so they eventually pulled down their proud exhibits from where they were hung. The Qur'an had proved its point: this is no man-made book.

Yet they tried everything to banish the Qur'an from the face of the earth. They even made an attempt on the life of the prophet. He fled to Madinah, another city. And there the Qur'an kept coming to him piece by piece. The challenge was repeated yet again. This time God reduced the emphasis as if to say, okay you couldn't produce a chapter like it; now produce a chapter even *remotely* like it. This challenge is mentioned in the Qur'an in chapter 2, verse 23.

They failed again. And the world has failed since. The challenge is still there in the Qur'an, and everyone who disbelieves the Qur'an can still pool together their abilities and resources to try and produce one like it. But they cannot. Isn't this an awesome miracle?

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Question 16

If God is Loving, Kind, and Merciful, why would He punish anyone in Hell?

Answer

Due to a slight misunderstanding, many people see this as an unresolvable contradiction. This question has troubled them to the point of driving them away from religion altogether. The misunderstanding begins with the assumption that God loves everyone, even sinners. Then it becomes difficult to explain why God would

punish sinners.

Some people attempt to explain their way around this by saying that God loves the sinner but hates the sin. This explanation would have been good enough if God would punish the sin and save the sinner. Instead, God will punish the *sinner,* so the problem remains.

To survey the problem a little further, consider the following quote from Matthew's Gospel:
"You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.' But I tell you: Love your enemies . . ." (Matthew 5:43-44).

Now, this passage indicates that it is a good thing to love one's enemies. It follows, then, that God, being infinitely good, must love His enemies too. But then, why would He punish them? Why, for example, would God torment some of His creatures day and night for ever and ever in a lake of burning sulphur if He loves them? (see Revelation 20:10)

The Qur'an resolves this problem by indicating quite clearly that although God is full of loving kindness He does not love sinners who refuse to change.

We know from the Qur'an that Allah does not like the following categories of people:

- mischief makers
- treacherous ingrates
- proud people
- prodigals
- rejectors of God's message.

It presents, therefore, no difficulty in the mind of a Muslim if God punishes such people. On the other hand,

it makes more sense that God will not treat the good and bad in the same manner. Therefore we must all try our best to do what pleases God, and seek His forgiveness for our failings.

The Qur'an tells us that Allah loves the following categories of people:

- those who do good
- those who repent for their sins
- those who keep themselves clean
- those who fulfil their pledges and are conscious of Allah
- those who are steadfast on the right path
- those who trust in Allah.

Let us therefore ask God to make us deserving of His infinite love.

***

Question 17

Why is it that Muslims do not accept the doctrine of original sin?

Answer

The reason Muslims do not accept this doctrine is that the word of God, the Qur'an, does not agree with it.

The Qur'an teaches that God is ever willing to forgive anyone who turns to him in sincere repentance. We find in the Qur'an that God taught Adam and Eve how to seek

His forgiven. When they did as God taught them, God forgave them (see Qur'an 20:122).

Adam and Eve were created with the potential to do either good or evil. They had a free choice either to obey God or disobey Him. They did not realise how deceptive the devil was and so, prompted by him, they made one wrong choice. Will God remain forever angry with them over that one mistake? No! Instead, God taught them how to repair their relationship with Him by praying for forgiveness. Muslims still often recite the same prayer, as follows:

قَالَ رَبَّنَا ظَلَمْنَا أَنفُسَنَا وَإِنْ لَمْ تَغْفِرْ لَنَا وَتَرْحَمْنَا لَنَكُونَنَّ مِنَ الْخَاسِرِينَ

(الأعراف 23)

"Our Lord, we have wronged our souls. If you do not forgive us and have mercy on us, then surely we are lost" (Qur'an 7:23).

What we obtain from that incident is not original sin, but original forgiveness, and an original lesson on how to seek that forgiveness. God set the precedent that He will forgive those who turn to Him in sincere repentance. We will all find ourselves in a similar situation as Adam and Eve. The prophet, on whom be peace, said that every child of Adam is a sinner, and the best of them are those who turn back to God in sincere repentance.

This shows that God does not demand absolute perfection from us humans. That would be an impossible

demand, since God alone is absolutely perfect. To err is human. God wants us to know that he will accept us as we are, shortcomings and all, as long as we are trying our best to obey Him.

Even in our human situations, it is well understood that absolute perfection is not to be demanded from anyone. Suppose teachers were to demand that all students must score 100% on all their tests, and that if they make even one mistake they will not pass. No one of sound mind will demand this, for it is clearly beyond human capacity. Similarly, God does not demand from people what is beyond their capacity (see Qur'an 2:226).

Some will say that Adam was created perfect and that when he sinned he ruined that perfection. This suggestion makes no sense. If perfection meant that Adam had no ability to choose between good and evil, then how did he exercise that choice which he supposedly did not have? And if he had the ability to choose, as Muslims believe, then why would God remain forever angry with him for his first mistake? Humankind was then in its infancy. We needed someone to pick us up when we fall, not someone to bulldoze us with a tremendous burden of sin and guilt.

Some will say that God could not forgive Adam even if He wanted to do so, since God is Just and He must exact justice. This is as if to say that justice is contrary to mercy, and that God is so fenced in by His own law that He has no freedom to do what He wants to do. How silly! The truth is that God warns us of His punishment, but He also promises forgiveness for those who sincerely

repent. If He decides to save sinners, who is there to say He cannot do what He wishes?

***

Question 18

You said that every child of Adam is a sinner. Does that mean we are born with sin?

Answer

No. Muslims believe that every child is born in a pure, natural state. Left to their own, children will grow up instinctively seeking the one true God, Allah. However, environmental influences and parents turn a child away from the pure, natural state. A saying of the prophet, on whom be peace and the blessings of God, confirms this. It says that each child is born in a natural state just as, for example a baby animal is born without any brand on its body; then the owner brands it with his own mark. Similarly, parents too would give a newborn their own religious identity (see Sahih al-Bukhari, Arabic-English, vol. 8, no. 597, and Sahih Muslim, Eng. Trans. vol 4, no. 6423).

The saying "every child of Adam is a sinner" means that every human being is a sinner, sin being an inevitable outcome of a fallible human nature. No matter how righteous a person is, he or she may at times disobey God through ignorance or forgetfulness. The

prophet, on whom be peace, meant to emphasize that the best person is the one who seeks forgiveness for his or her sins. Furthermore, he said that one who repents from sin is like one without sin. God says in the Qur'an that He will replace the evil deeds with good for those who repent, believe, and do righteous deeds (see Qur'an 25:70).

Another saying of the prophet indicates that God actually intended that humans will be a species that commit sins so they can turn to Him and He would forgive them (see Sahih Muslim, Eng. Trans., vol. 4, nos. 6620-2). This is a much better explanation than the popular conception according to which God at first sees that humans are good, then God discovers that they are wicked and so, being sorry that He made them in the first place, God eventually decides to wipe them off the face of the earth; but then he changes His mind again and lets them eventually procreate and fill the earth although they are still sinful as ever. The better explanation is that God knew in advance that we would sin, and we turned out just the way God planned. God does not discover new things — He knows everything always.

So, simply put, the Islamic belief is that people are not born in sin but they will eventually commit sins for which they should sincerely repent, and God will wipe out their sins. People do not inherit sins. Sin is something you do wrong. You couldn't have done anything before you were born, therefore you were born without sin. The Qur'an teaches that God does not hold us responsible for what others did before we were born,

and no innocent person would carry the guilt of another (see Qur'an 4:111; 6:164). This coincides with our own sense of justice. No one considers it right to blame children for the sins of their ancestors, or to punish the innocent so that the guilty may go free.

***

Question 19

If there is no original sin, how come everyone has to die? Isn't death the consequence of sin?

Answer

Muslims have a very positive view of life and death. Life on earth is temporary. Death is the door through which one enters into everlasting life. Muslims do not see death as something scary or frightful. Death is the way one returns to Allah.

God says in the Qur'an:

قُلْ يَتَوَفَّاكُم مَّلَكُ الْمَوْتِ الَّذِي وُكِّلَ بِكُمْ ثُمَّ إِلَى رَبِّكُمْ تُرْجَعُونَ

(السجدة 11)

"Say: The angel of death, who has been given charge of you, will carry off your souls. Then to your Lord you shall all return" (Qur'an 32:11).

Muslims hopeful of God's mercy look forward to the day when God will address them as stated in the Qur'an:

يَاأَيَّتُهَا النَّفسُ الْمُطْمَئِنَّةُ(27)ارْجِعِي إِلَى رَبِّكِ رَاضِيَةًمَرْضِيَّةً(28)فَـادْخُلِي فِي عِبَادِي(29)وَادْخُلِي جَنَّتِي (الفجر 27–30)

"O peaceful and fully satisfied soul, return to your Lord: you are well-pleased (with your good end) and well-pleasing (in the sight of your Lord). Join My (righteous) servants and enter my Paradise" (Qur'an 89: 27-30).

Viewed in this way, death becomes a joy for the true believer. This view of death was further explained in a saying of the Prophet, on whom be peace. He said:
"Allah loves to meet whoever loves to meet Him."

It is true that no one likes to die. But the prophet, on whom be peace, said:
"When death comes to a believer, he is given good news of the pleasure of Allah and His gifts. There is then nothing dearer to him than what is ahead of him. So he loves to meet Allah, and Allah loves to meet him" (This was reported by Bukhari and Muslim).

This positive view of death should not imply a negative view of life. Life should be lived to its fullest, and believers should not wish for an end to their lives. The prophet said: that no believer should wish for death, for, as long as there is life in you, if you are righteous, perhaps you may increase your good deeds, and if you

are sinful, perhaps given time you may repent (reported by Bukhari).

God in His plan devised this earthly life as a temporary life. The earth is a testing ground. Those who accept God's guidance in this life will be given the abundance of God's grace in the next, the everlasting life. When God decreed for humans to live on the earth, He declared:

قُلْنَا اهْبِطُوا مِنْهَا جَمِيعًا فَإِمَّا يَأْتِيَنَّكُمْ مِنِّي هُدًى فَمَنْ تَبِعَ هُدَايَ فَلَا خَوْفٌ عَلَيْهِمْ وَلَا هُمْ يَحْزَنُونَ(38)وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَئِكَ أَصْحَابُ النَّارِ هُمْ فِيهَا خَالِدُون (البقرة 38–39)

"Hence there shall come to you guidance from Me now and again; whoever will follow it shall have neither fear nor sorrow, and whoever will refuse to accept it and defy Our Revelation, they shall be doomed to the Fire wherein they shall remain forever" (Qur'an 2:38-39).

Again, God says that He "created life and death so that He may try you, which of you is best in conduct" (Qur'an 67:2).

God says further:

إِنَّا خَلَقْنَا الْإِنسَانَ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ أَمْشَاجٍ نَبْتَلِيهِ فَجَعَلْنَاهُ سَمِيعًا بَصِيرًا(2)إِنَّا هَدَيْنَاهُ السَّبِيلَ إِمَّا شَاكِرًا وَإِمَّا كَفُورًا (الانسان 2–3)

أَلَمْ نَجْعَلْ لَهُ عَيْنَيْنِ(8)وَلِسَانًا وَشَفَتَيْنِ(9)وَهَدَيْنَاهُ النَّجْدَيْنِ (البلد 8–9)

"Indeed We created man from a mixed drop to try him and therefore We made him capable of hearing and seeing. We showed him the way, whether to be grateful or disbelieving" (Qur'an 76:2-3); see also 90:8-10).

In this life we should use our God-given faculties to learn and follow God's message. The Qur'an says that those who end up being punished for their sins will regret that they neither listened nor used their brains when God's message had reached them (see Qur'an 67:10).

Incidentally, in the Qur'an it is not said that God warned Adam and Eve of death if they ate from the forbidden tree. What God actually said to them was that if they ate from the tree they would become wrongdoers (see Qur'an 2:35). Given the Qur'anic viewpoint, there is no reason to consider death as a consequence for sin.

***

Question 20

How can you say that death is not the consequence for sin whereas the Bible clearly teaches that it is?

Answer

The best way to understand this would be to study the story found in the book of Genesis in the Holy Bible.

Let us begin with a brief outline of the story. We are told that God warned Adam that if he eats from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, he will surely die. This was communicated also to Eve. The serpent, however, being deceptive, promised Eve that they will not die from eating it. So she ate the fruit, and gave also to her husband. As a result of eating the fruit, they realised for the first time that they were naked, so they covered themselves with fig leaves. When they heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid from Him among the trees. He called out to them asking where they were and asked whether they had eaten from the forbidden tree. Adam blamed Eve, and Eve blamed the serpent. God then cursed all three of them. The serpent shall henceforth crawl on its belly and eat dust. The woman shall suffer in childbearing and remain under the domination of her husband. The man shall have to sweat for his living until he returns to dust. God then said: "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." So God banished him from the garden and placed a flaming sword to prevent access to the tree of life (Condensed from Genesis 2:17 - 3:22).

Many people misunderstand this story to mean that physical death is a consequence for sin. But the biblical scholars who are aware of all its implications explain otherwise. *The Interpreter's One Volume Commentary on the Bible* explains that death here means separation from God, the giver of "life" (p. 6).

The reason for this other explanation is the obvious fact that in the story Adam did not die. He lived on for 930 years (see Genesis 5:5). And when God spoke of his eventual death, He mentioned it not as a consequence of sin, but as a natural outcome of the fact that Adam was created from dust — and to dust he must return (see Genesis 3:19).

When a few verses later it is stated that God deprived Adam access to the tree of life many people again conclude that because of sin Adam was deprived of everlasting life. But this too is not what the book of Genesis says. The story goes that once Adam gained knowledge of good and evil, God was concerned that he may now gain eternal life also (see Genesis 3:22). The *Abingdon Bible Commentary* explains that Adam was deprived of eternal life because he had already acquired some power, namely knowledge, and God was concerned lest Adam should acquire more, namely eternal life, and become a threat to God (see the *Abingdon Bible Commentary,* p.223).

It is clear from the story that even if Adam was promised death he was given a lesser penalty, and death must be taken as the maximum possible penalty — that, obviously, was not given. Elsewhere in the book of Genesis, when God killed certain men for their wickedness, it meant instant death (see Genesis 38: 7, 10). But the death that comes as the natural end to physical life is not a penalty for sin. It is better to understand that God in His mercy gave a lesser penalty to Adam than to suppose that God in His anger gave

more penalties in addition to what He stated initially. This is why Reverend W. K. Lowther Clarke explained in his Bible commentary that God relented and gave Adam a lesser penalty (see the *Concise Bible Commentary*, 1952, p. 343).

In the next question, we will examine the Qur'anic perspective on the Genesis story.

***

Question 21

Does the Qur'an have the story of the Fall of Man as told in the Bible? Are the stories similar or different?

Answer

They are similar in a basic outline, but different on a few important points.

First, let us consider the basic outline. Adam and Eve were placed in a garden in a state of happiness. God instructed them to eat from any tree except one tree. Eventually, they were deceived into eating from the forbidden tree and their nakedness became apparent to them. God then expelled them from the garden.

Now, the disagreements.

1. Neither book names the fruit, but the Bible alone calls it the tree of knowledge of good and evil. The Qur'an does not call it such, but teaches that humans are already inspired with the knowledge of good and evil at

creation in order to enable them to exercise choice between good and evil. This knowledge did not come as a result of eating from a forbidden tree.

2. The Bible says the deceiver was a serpent, but the Qur'an says it was Satan.

3. The Bible says that Adam was not deceived, but only Eve was deceived; it says that Eve then gave the fruit to Adam and he ate. On the other hand, more than one Qur'anic passages mention that they were both deceived. One passage specifically says that Satan approached Adam and deceived him. The Qur'an does not single out Eve for blame in any passage.

4. The Bible says that when the couple heard the sound of God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, they hid from him among the trees. So God called out to Adam asking where he was, and asking if he ate from the forbidden tree. On the other hand the Qur'an does not depict God in limited human form. The Qur'an and the Bible both teach that God knows everything always.

5. According to the Bible, when the couple was confronted with their mistake, they blamed each other, and Adam even blamed God because God gave him the woman who gave him the fruit. According to the Qur'an they did not pass the blame. Instead, both repented.

6. According to the Bible, God cursed them. According to the Qur'an, God forgave them and guided them.

7. According to the Bible, they were driven out of the garden because God was afraid that they may eat from

the tree of life and live forever. According to the Qur'an, God's plan was to educate our first parents in paradise, then send them into the world for a limited time to resist Satan, the enemy. They were sent to earth as part of God's plan for them; not as a way of preventing them access to the tree of life, but as a test to distinguish those deserving of everlasting enjoyment in God's paradise.

8. According to the Bible, God had said that when Adam eats from the tree he would surely die, and the serpent said they will not surely die. The serpent was right — they did not die. Contrary to this, in the Qur'an, God said that if Adam and Eve eat from the tree they will become wrongdoers, ththey will have to leave the garden and come out to where they will have to labour. Satan, however, promised them that if they eat from the tree they will live forever. Satan was wrong — they did not live forever.

9. According to the Bible, because of God's curse, serpents have to crawl and eat dust, women have to suffer in childbirth, and men have to sweat for a living. According to the Qur'an, no such curse was issued. The difficulties of life on earth are what makes it different from life in paradise.

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Question 22

Why does the Qur'an agree with the Bible in some things and disagree in other things?

Answer

The Bible is an important means by which people had access to God's message for thousands of years. It contains many truths from God. Throughout history many prophets were sent by God to guide humankind. The Qur'an teaches that prophets were sent to every people to call them to shun false gods and worship only the one true God. Some of the truths which those prophets taught are recorded in the Bible. A seeker of truth cannot deny those truths.

The Bible has had more impact on western civilization than any other book. The Bible's emphasis on the belief in the one and only God has helped millions of people to turn away from worshipping idols and other false gods. Famous commandments like 'you shall not murder' have become universal principles. Many of the Bible's moral principles have helped to convert some of the worst people into compassionate, good citizens.

Obviously, if the Qur'an were to disagree with these moral and theological truths the Qur'an would have to teach the opposite of truth. This the Qur'an does not do. Where the Bible is true the Qur'an is also true, since they agree on many fundamental truths. This agreement, however, does not mean that one book copied out of another as some individuals are quick to conclude. This we have already demonstrated in our answer to Question 6. The reason the Qur'an agrees with the truths in the Bible is that those truths and the Qur'anic passages all come from the same source, namely God. Since He alone

revealed the Qur'an and all the truths of the Bible, it is only logical that the truth will be one, regardless in which book it is found.

When the Qur'an disagrees with the Bible it is also for a reason. The Qur'an was revealed at a time when people knew the art of writing, and so designated scribes were able to write down the revelation immediately to ensure its preservation in written form. At the time people were also accustomed to memorizing eloquent compositions. With God's help they began a practice of memorizing the Qur'an thus ensuring its preservation also in the hearts of millions of believers throughout history. Due to these two preservation methods, the Qur'an available all over the world today is the same in its original language whether you buy a copy in Canada, Australia, or China.

Therefore the Qur'an can be trusted in its entirety, and a believer can confidently say, "All of it is from our Lord" as the Qur'an states in 3:7. God has promised that He will safeguard the book (Qur'an 15:9). He further says that no falsehood can get into the Qur'an (Qur'an 41:42). He tells us that He sent the Qur'an to confirm the truth of what is in the previous scriptures and also to expose the errors that crept into those scriptures (Qur'an 5:48).

So one reason the Qur'an differs from the Bible will be understood best in light of the transmission history of the two books.

Another type of difference between the two books pertains to the specific instructions that God gave. God

always gives instructions which are suitable for the varying conditions of human life. Some of the instructions in the Bible, were meant for a particular historical circumstance, and are therefore no longer applicable. Since the Qur'an is newer, it contains God's latest instructions which are still applicable to our present conditions, and which provide the best solution for some of life's most pressing problems today.

***

Question 23

Does the Qur'an teach Muslims to believe in the Torah, the Psalms and the gospel?

If so, how come Muslims do not accept the Bible?

Answer

The Qur'an commands Muslims to believe in the revelations given to all of God's prophets. These prophets include Moses, David, and Jesus (peace be upon them). Muslims must believe in the revelations received by such prophets. Books associated with them are called by the names Torah, Psalms, and Gospel. Muslims, therefore believe in the original Torah, Psalms and Gospel.

The Bible contains books by the same names and other books besides. Muslims are not commanded to believe

in the other books. To be more specific, the Bible contains 66 books in the Protestant version, and 73 in the Catholic version. In the Bible, consisting 66 or 73 books, the Torah is represented as 5 books, the Psalms as 1, and the Gospel in 4 versions. This makes a total of 10 books within the Bible. Muslims are not required to believe in any more than the ten books.

But that assumes that the 10 books referred to are the same as what the Qur'an refers to when the Qur'an speaks of the Torah, Psalms and Gospel. A further check proves that these books changed contents over time although their names remained the same. To understand this concept, consider that a book like the Encyclopedia Britannica changes its contents and size several times throughout its history, yet is called by the same name. Obviously the Encyclopedia Britannica is not the same as it used to be.

A closer check shows that something similar occurred with the Torah, Psalms, and Gospel. For a long time many people believed that Moses wrote the five books called Torah in the Bible. But now it is widely known that Moses could not have written those books in their entirety. One evidence for this is that Chapter 34 of the book of Deuteronomy describes the death and burial of Moses, and how the people mourned for him after his death. Obviously, Moses did not write that passage.

Biblical scholars also acknowledge that the present composition of the Psalms cannot in its entirety be traced back to David.

The Gospels is a more complex matter because the

Bible contains not one but four. There is only one true Gospel which Jesus preached, but these are represented in four versions each according to a different author. The Qur'an requires Muslims to believe in the original Gospel that Jesus preached before the four versions were written. Everyone agrees that the four versions were written long after Jesus.

***

Question 24

What does Islam say about homosexuality?

Answer

Islam teaches that homosexual acts are sinful and punishable by God. This teaching comes not from human beings, but from the Creator of all humans. God tells us in His own words how He punished the people of Lot for their homosexual behaviour.

The story of the prophet Lot, on whom be peace, finds mention in several Qur'anic passages (see especially Qur'an 26:160-175). From these passages we learn that God saved Lot and the righteous ones of his family, and rained on the rest a shower of brimstone, so they were utterly destroyed. This is mentioned in the Qur'an not only for the sake of information, but mainly to serve as a warning to anyone who dares to repeat such acts.

Muslims believe that every human action leads to

consequences. Good actions entail good results, and evil actions entail evil consequences. Some of these consequences may not become known for many years after a certain action. The consequences of some actions will become manifest only after death when one enters a new, everlasting life. To understand this point, consider the fact that often people contract a deadly disease which is diagnosed many years after the f. A common mistake among humans is that if they do not see any negative consequences for their actions they consider their actions harmless. Human experience has taught us that a source of superior knowledge can be of tremendous benefit to humans. In the past, doctors unwittingly gave blood tainted with the AIDS virus to thousands of patients. If a source of superior knowledge had warned us beforehand, and we paid attention to that warning, we could have saved many people from this deadly disease.

God, the source of all knowledge, warns us of His punishment if people perpetrate homosexual acts. Let us pay attention and learn the easy way.

Some will say that a person may be born with homosexual tendencies. We say that everyone is a free agent. God lays before us two paths and has given us knowledge of where these paths lead. One is the path to which the devil calls us. We must avoid that. Another is the path leading to paradise. We must stick to that one. Everyone experiences evil prompting from time to time. We must resist those with all our might. If one feels a tendency to do something that God prohibits, he or she should seek help from a community of loving, caring,

believers who would understand his or her difficulty and help him or her overcome it.

A common ploy of the devil is to convince people that they cannot avoid sin. Then they do not even try. But God promises that the devil can have no lasting power over those who sincerely seek God (see Qur'an 15:42).

Finally, our bodies are given to us in trust from God. One should not use his or her body contrary to the user guide provided by its Maker. Consenting adults also need God's consent.

***

Question 25

Why do Muslim women cover their heads? Isn't this a sign of subjection of women?

Answer

Muslim women cover their heads because God so directed in His final book, the Glorious Qur'an. The head cover is specifically mentioned in 24:31.

This instruction from God is only one aspect of a wider context of purity of thought and action for men and women. Islam has very strict rules against adultery and fornication, and introduces many cautious measures to ensure the prevention and avoidance of such sins. One measure is the prescription that men and women as far as possible should avoid intermingling (see Qur'an 33:53).

This is why men and women pray in separate areas or separate rows in the Mosque.

Another measure is that men and women should cover the specified areas of their bodies which may arouse sexual desire in others (see Qur'an 7:26; 33:59).

Yet another measure is that men and women should lower or turn their gaze away from looking at a person of the opposite sex (see Qur'an 24:31).

The idea that the head covering is a sign of subjection of women is found not in the Qur'an but in another religious book with which the Qur'an does not always agree. That other book teaches that women should have a sign of authority over their heads because man was not created from woman, but woman from man. The same book says that a man should not cover his head because he is the image and glory of God; and a woman should cover her head because she is the glory of man. The Qur'an does not identify with these ideas. The Qur'anic prescription of head cover does not in any way imply the subjection of women.

People often confuse the Islamic prescriptions with ideas they are already familiar with. Therefore when they see Muslim women covering their heads they hastily conclude that it is for the same reasons mentioned in some other religious book. But to gain a better understanding of Islamic prescriptions, they have to be viewed within the framework of Islamic thought.

Another mistake made by many is as follows. When they hear that the Qur'an includes the story of Adam and Eve they conclude that the Qur'an also upholds the idea

that Eve was responsible for the fall of man, and that the subjection of women is a necessary result of God's curse on them. On the contrary, the Qur'an is free of such ideas. In the Qur'an, Adam and Eve were both approached by the Devil. The Devil did not approach Adam through Eve. Adam is therefore specifically blamed in the Qur'an 20:121. In other verses they are both blamed; but in no verse is Eve alone singled out to be blamed for the fall of man. Although men are charged with the responsibility of leadership in Islam too, this is in view of the practical dynamics of human interaction as prescribed by God. It is not because of a curse on women.

It would be a mistake to take the prescriptions of Islam and associate them with ideas held outside of Islam. Within Islam, women are capable of as much good as men, and they stand before God equally honoured.

***

Question 26

The Bible says in Revelation 22:18, 19 that nothing is to be added to it. In view of this, how can a believer in the Bible accept the Qur'an?

Answer

The Christian scholar William Barclay in his commentary on Revelation quotes another Christian

scholar R.H. Charles as saying that the above mentioned passage in Revelation "may not be part of the original book at all" (Revised 1976, volume 2, p. 232). After mentioning the reasons for this, Barclay agrees with Charles by saying:

"It is, therefore, by no means impossible that these words are not the words of John but of a later scribe anxious that none should alter the book in the days to come" (vol. 2, p. 232).

But even if that passage is genuine, it does not prohibit a believer from believing also in the Qur'an. Many people misunderstand the passage if they are unaware of the history of the Bible and how it came to be written. They assume that because the book entitled Revelation is the last book in the Bible it must have been the last book from God, and that every later book should be rejected.

However, according to many Bible Commentaries such an understanding is wrong. *The Abingdon Bible Commentary* explains as follows:

"The fact that the words happen to come at the end of the English Bible has led some to suppose that they applied to the whole Bible itself. This, of course, is not so. As a matter of fact, several New Testament books were written after Revelation" (*The Abingdon Bible Commentary,* 1929, p. 1398).

As the above quote explains, the book entitled Revelation cannot be the last book from God. The Bible itself contains some books which were written after the book entitled Revelation.

The *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures,*

shows that four books in the Bible were written after Revelation (Revised edition 1984, p. 1547).

Similarly, *Asimov's Guide to the Bible* shows that Revelation was not the last book of the Bible to be written (vol. 2, p. 567).

Another book entitled *Key to the Bible* claims that the last book of the Bible was 2 Peter (see vol. 3, p. 152).

Yet another Christian scholar points out that at least six books in the Bible were written after Revelation (see *Reading the New Testament* by Pheme Perkins, 1988, pp. 2-8).

Clearly, then, the passage does not prohibit its believers from accepting later messages from God. In spite of that passage, believers were still able to believe in other books which they included in the Bible.

Every seeker of truth must examine the Qur'an too to see if it really is from God. One who examines the Qur'an will find the following:

1. Fourteen hundred years later, all opponents of the Qur'an have failed to produce a book like the Qur'an. The Qur'an rightly said that they can never do it (see our answer to Question 15).

2. The Qur'an speaks about the future, then the future unfolds exactly the way the Qur'an said it would.

3. The Qur'an describes aspects of history unknown to its contemporaries and confirmed by independent studies (see Question #6).

4. The Qur'an makes statements which no human being could make without knowledge of modern sciences, or prito the invention of the microscope (Ask for our free

brochure entitled: Scientific Accuracy of the Qur'an Amazes University of Toronto Professor).

***

Question 27

Does the Qur'an contain any prophecies about the future? Have any of these proved true?

Answer

Yes, the Qur'an contains many prophecies about the future. Many of these have already proved true, and we confidently expect that the others will also come to pass in due time. In addition, no statement in the Qur'an has ever proved to be false.

Let us see some examples of Qur'anic prophecies which were already fulfilled. One example is a prophecy that occurs in Surah 30 of the Qur'an. In the first six verses Allah promised that the Romans who had just been defeated in the year 615 C.E. would turn around and win a decisive victory within nine years.

At the time this statement was made, no human could envision how it could come to pass. The Romans had been so soundly defeated that no hope was left that they could make a comeback within such a short period of time. The unbelievers mocked at the Muslims over this passage in the Qur'an because they thought the prophecy would surely fail. One man, Ummayah bin Khalaf by

name, even placed a bet of a hundred camels that the prophecy would fail. Abu Bakr, the closest follower of the prophet, on whom be peace, took up that challenge because he was sure that the word of God can never fail. And true enough, within the specified period, in the year 624 CE, the Romans confronted the Persians in battle at a place called Issus. The Romans won their decisive victory exactly as prophecised in the Qur'an, and Abu Bakr, may Allah be pleased with him, won the bet of one hundred camels. In the meantime, however, revelation from Allah had prohibited gambling, so the prophet directed Abu Bakr to give away the camels to the poor and needy.

So the prophecy was fulfilled. But there is more to this. The same verses contain yet another prophecy. It says that while the Romans are winning their victory, the believers in the Qur'an will rejoice in the victory granted by Allah. We know from history that in that very year the Muslims were threatened with total annihilation, but Allah rescued them. The Muslims had been driven out of Mecca their hometown. Now they found safe haven in Medina. But the unbelievers could not rest knowing that the Muslims were free to practice their faith somewhere else. So they marched against the Muslims with an army of one thousand men fully equipped for battle. The Muslims mustered the best defence they could, a mere 313 men lacking suitable equipment for battle. From a human point of view, the greater force would win, but the help of Allah was with the small group of believers. Miraculously, the believers won, and the Qur'anic

prophecy was fulfilled despite all odds. The unfolding of this double prophecy proves beyond doubt that the Qur'an could not have been authored by any human being.

Another prophecy occurs in Surah 111 of the Qur'an. That Surah states that a certain man and his wife will perish as unbelievers. This was uttered at a time when no one but God could say who will or will not become believers later on. Many of the most severe opponents in the early days became devoted followers in later days. But not this couple. They tried everything to oppose, ridicule, and disprove the Qur'an. One would expect that they would also pretend to become believers just to throw doubt on the accuracy of the Qur'an. But they did not apply this obvious strategy. What prevented them, if not the power of God and the truth of His word?

In this way many prophecies were fulfilled, and not one has ever failed. This gives us every reason to place our full confidence in the book of God.

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